

# Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Month

**Walk Together**

Embrace Differences

**Build Legacies**

# Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Month

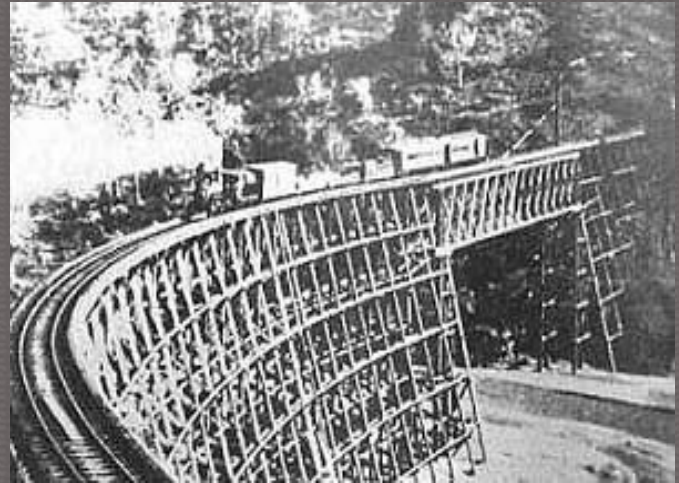
Since 1977, the month of May has been designated to recognize the achievements and contributions to the American story by Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs).

We celebrate the cultural traditions, ancestry, native languages, and unique experiences represented among more than 56 ethnic groups (speaking over 100 languages) from Asia and the Pacific Islands who live in the United States.



# Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Month

The month of May denotes several events in AAPI history, including the immigration of the first Japanese people to the United States May 7, 1843. The finalization of the transcontinental railroad was accomplished May 10, 1869 by predominantly Chinese immigrants.



# Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Month

While these AAPI communities have roots that span the globe, their success stories are uniquely American.

Generations of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders have helped develop and defend the United States, often in the face of tremendous racial and cultural prejudice.



# Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Month

This presentation provides snapshots that briefly cover the integral role played by the many AAPIs who helped shape and defend this nation.



# Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Month

The Medal of Honor is the United States of America's highest military honor, awarded for personal acts of valor above and beyond the call of duty.



Medal of Honor  
U.S. Army



Medal of Honor  
U.S. Air Force



Medal of Honor  
U.S. Navy



# Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Month

Presently, 33 Asian American Pacific Islanders have been awarded the Medal of Honor. Below is a list of those brave individuals.

## Philippine-American War:

José B. Nisperos, PVT

## Peacetime:

Telesforo de la Cruz Trinidad, Fireman 2<sup>nd</sup> Class  
(only Medal of Honor issued in peacetime).

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## World War II:

Jose Calugas, SR, CPT

Rudolph B. Davila, SSG

Barney Fushimi Hajiro, PVT

Mikio Hasemoto, PVT

Joe J. Hayashi, SGT

Shizuya Hayashi, PVT

Daniel K. Inouye, 2LT

Yeiki Kobashigawa, TSGT

Robert T. Kuroda, SSG

Kaoru Moto, PFC

Sadao S. Munemori, PFC

Kiyoshi k. Muranaga, PFC



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## World War II:

Masato Nakae, PVT

Shinyei Nakamine, PVT

William Kanzo Nakamura, PFC

Joe M. Nishimoto, PFC

Allan Masaharu Ohata, SGT

James K. Okubo, TSGT

Yukio Okutsu, TSGT

Frank H. Ono, PFC

Kazuo Otani, SSG

George Taro “Joe” Sakato, PVT

Ted “Tak” Tanouye, SGT

Francis Brown Wai, CPT

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## Korean War:

Hiroshi “Hershey” Miyamura, SSG

Leroy A. Mendonca, SGT (youngest MOH recipient)

Herbert K. Pilila’au, PFC

Anthony T. Kaho'ohanohano, PFC

## Vietnam War:

Terry Teruo Kawamura, CPL

Elmelindo Rodrigues Smith, SFC

Rodney Jamus Takahashi Yano, SFC



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Regiment Coat of Arms

The 1st Filipino Infantry Regiment was a segregated United States Army infantry regiment made up of Filipino Americans from the continental United States and veterans of the Battle of the Philippines that saw combat during World War II.

It was formed and activated at Camp San Luis Obispo, California, under the auspices of the California National Guard.

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Originally created as a battalion, it was declared a regiment in July 1942. Deployed to New Guinea in 1944, it became a source of manpower for special forces and units that would serve in occupied territories.

In 1945, it deployed to the Philippines, where it first saw combat as a unit. After major combat operations, it remained in the Philippines until it returned to California and was deactivated in 1946 at Camp Stoneman.



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The Chinese-American Composite Wing (CACW), the famed “Flying Tigers,” was a joint U.S. Army Air Forces and a Republic of China Air Force organization. It was assigned to 14th Air Force in China during World War II.

The operational units were jointly commanded by both American and Chinese air force officers, and many of the unit's aircraft were manned by Americans of Chinese ancestry.

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The CACW could claim the destruction of 190 Japanese aircraft in air-to-air combat, and 301 on the ground. The fighters and bombers destroyed at least 1,500 Japanese vehicles and sunk several hundred thousand tons of Japanese merchant and naval shipping equipment. In addition, they took a heavy toll on Japanese ground troops, facilities, railroads and bridges.



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Not a single CACW bomber was lost to enemy fighters, a tribute to the abilities of the Wing's B-25 aircrews, and the quality of the escort protection provided by the Wing's fighter pilots.



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The 442nd Regimental Combat Team was an infantry regiment in the U.S. Army comprised of Americans of Japanese ancestry. The 442nd fought in Italy and France during World War II against the German Army of Hitler's Third Reich.

The 442nd Regiment was the most decorated unit for its size and length of service in the history of American warfare. Its motto was “*Go for Broke*”.



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The 4,000 men who initially made up the unit in April 1943 had to be replaced nearly 2.5 times.

In total, about 14,000 men served, earning 9,486 Purple Hearts. The unit was awarded eight Presidential Unit Citations (5 earned in one month). Twenty-one of its members were awarded Medals of Honor.

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Although thousands of Asian-Pacific-American women have served and are serving in the U.S. Armed Forces in times of war and peace, only a small number of these women have told their stories by registering with the Women In Military Service For America Memorial. In celebration of Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Month, we are recognizing several of these women by sharing their military experiences.



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Florence Smith Finch

Florence Smith Finch, the daughter of an American soldier and a Filipino mother, was working for the U.S. Army during World War II when the Japanese occupied the Philippines.

Claiming Filipino citizenship, she avoided being imprisoned with other enemy nationals at Santo Tomas Internment Camp in Manila.

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She joined the underground resistance movement and smuggled food, medicine, and supplies to American captives. Eventually, she was arrested by the Japanese, tortured, and sentenced to three years imprisonment.

After serving five months of her sentence, Finch was liberated by American forces. Returning to the United States aboard a Coast Guard transport, she headed for Buffalo, New York, her father's hometown.



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She then enlisted in the Coast Guard to “avenge the death of her late husband,” a Navy PT boat crewman killed at Corregidor.

Seaman First Class Finch was the first U. S. Coast Guard Women’s Reserve member to receive the Asian-Pacific Campaign ribbon in recognition of her service in the Philippines.

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At the end of the war, she was awarded the civilian U.S. Medal of Freedom.

Of her wartime activities she said: *“I feel very humble because my activities in the war effort were trivial compared with those of people who gave their lives for their country.”*

In 1995, the Coast Guard honored her service when it named a building on Sand Island, Hawaii, after her.



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Tulsi Gabbard was raised by a Hindu mother and a Catholic father in “a multi-racial, multi-cultural, multi-faith family.”



*“My parents...there were five kids in the family and they taught us from a very young age that...the only place happiness can be found is in the service of others.”*

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An advocate for environmental policy, Gabbard successfully ran for the Hawaii State Legislature in 2002, becoming its youngest person ever elected.

A year later, she joined the Hawaii National Guard. In 2004 she voluntarily deployed to Iraq, serving two combat zone tours in the Middle East.





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In 2013 she made history as the first female combat veteran, first Hindu, and first female of Samoan ancestry to become a member of Congress.



*“In the military, I learned that 'leadership' means raising your hand and volunteering for the tough, important assignments.”*

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In 2013, Brigadier General Miyako Schanely, deputy commander of 412th Theater Engineer Command (TEC), made history as the first female Army Reserve engineer promoted to general officer.

Her promotion also made her the second Japanese-American woman to be promoted to general officer.





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Schanely's mother and her father both served in the Air Force. Her stepfather, an Army warrant officer, performed counterintelligence work in the Pacific as the rest of his family was forced into an internment camp.

She credits her military career as a reflection of her family's military heritage, a proud tradition going back to World War II.

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The 412th TEC is one of only two such commands in the Army. She had previously served as chief of staff for the 416th, the only other TEC.

Additionally, she works for the State University of New York North Country Consortium, a partnership that collaborates to bring a variety of academic programs to Fort Drum and the Northern New York community.



# Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Month

In an increasingly diverse nation, AAPIs stand apart as one of the most diverse communities.

Generations of AAPIs have helped develop and defend the United States, often in the face of tremendous racial and cultural prejudice.

Despite these difficulties, these men and women struggled, sacrificed, and persevered to build a better life for their children and all Americans.

# Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Month

This observance gives us the opportunity to honor, recognize, and celebrate the rich diversity, leadership, and enduring empowerment of all Asian American and Pacific Islanders, and their dedicated service and contributions to the betterment of our nation.



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*“With courage, grit, and an abiding belief in American ideals, Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders have challenged our Nation to be better.”*

—President Barack Obama

# Sources

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